

CHRIST'S CHARGE TO PETER.

A S E R M O N,

PREACHED

IN THE OLD CHURCH, MACCLESFIELD,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

TRIENNIAL VISITATION

OF

THE LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER,

MAY THE TWENTIETH, 1841.

BY THE

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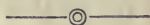
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A S E R M O N.



JOHN, XXI, 15—17.

“ So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord ; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith unto him the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord ; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, Lovest thou me ? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me ? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

THIS incident in the Apostle's life, which is given with such touching simplicity in the passage just read to you, exhibits in the most striking colours, the tenderness and compassion of our Saviour's character. The fall of Peter had been attended by circumstances which had materially aggravated the guilt of his denial. But if his crime had been a heinous one, his repentance had been deep and bitter. Peter had

mourned over his faithlessness in all the anguish of a broken heart; and it seems to have been the special object of our Lord, in whose eyes the humbled and the contrite spirit is the most acceptable sacrifice that the sinner can present to him, by this public expression of regard, to speak peace and consolation to his repentant disciple's soul.

“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” was the question proposed to him in the presence of all the disciples. They are words that must have pierced to the very depth of Peter's heart: they seemed to imply a doubt of his attachment; and surely every thought and association of the past, that must at that moment have come crowding upon Peter's mind, would have told him that the doubt might well be felt. Thrice had he to endure the humbling question, and thrice (as if to cancel the disgrace of his thrice-repeated treachery) he was called upon to make a public confession of his love. The rebuke was keenly felt,—“Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

But if the question had probed painfully his wounded spirit, the words that followed must have been joy and gladness to his heart—“Jesus saith unto him, Feed my Sheep.” Here was the seal and token of assured forgiveness. Christ intrusts to his beloved disciple the care and guardianship of the flock, which he had purchased with his own blood:

he sends him forth to seek his sheep dispersed in this naughty world, and by the faithful preaching of the word, to bring them within the safe enclosure of his fold, and to feed and comfort them when there. Henceforward he would supply a test to Peter, by which to prove the depth and sincerity of his affection, "If thou lovest me, feed my sheep." Again,—“feed my lambs.” The good Shepherd, who “gathers the lambs with his arm,”* commits to the especial consideration of his servant, the feeble and more helpless portion of his flock. Peter must remember his own fall, and have a fellow-feeling for his brethren. He must strengthen the weak—recal the backslider—comfort the broken-hearted, and raise up them that fall—“If thou lovest me, feed my lambs.”

I must not, however, on the present occasion, dwell longer upon this interesting record, as it bears upon the individual history of St. Peter, but shall at once pass on to that more general view of the subject which, under the implored guidance of the Holy Spirit, I desire to bring before you this morning. I purpose to regard these words as exhibiting to the Ambassadors of Christ, in every age—

1. The grand motive which should animate the Minister in his work. And,
2. The special object for which the Ministry was ordained.

First.—The motive which should animate us in our Ministry: we find it involved in our Saviour's

* Isaiah, xl. 11.

appeal to Peter,—“Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest* thou me.”

There was a work of the first importance to be intrusted to Peter and his brethen, and all the powers of earth and hell were confederate together to mar the progress of that work ; and in order to animate his fainting disciples to zeal and perseverance in their labours for the souls of men, the most powerful principle of our nature was to be consecrated and enlisted in the cause of Christ.

Now there are various springs of human action, which, from time to time, call forth into operation the latent energies of our minds, and give their peculiar complexion to our lives. To all this variety of motive Jesus, who “needed not that any should testify to him of man, for he knew what was IN man,”* had it in his power to appeal. For instance, we prove ourselves to be creatures who, in our social character, are influenced and swayed by fear. There was full scope for a forcible appeal to the feelings on this point. As those who held their very existence at the pleasure of *His* will, who has not only power to kill the body, but, after death, “to destroy both soul and body in hell,”† He might have set before his disciples’ eyes the terrors of eternal punishment, the certain consequence of faithlessness in their office, as a powerful incentive to their zeal. But though, perhaps, in a very subordinate degree, this may be a legitimate motive for exertion, still St. John tells us that “fear has torment,”§ and that too of so agonizing

* John, II. 25.

† Matthew, x. 28.

§ 1 John, IV. 18.

a description that, could we conceive it possible that it should become the master-principle of our lives, so far from rendering us useful and energetic in our work, the constant pressure on the feelings would unhinge the constitution of our nature, and could only terminate in the paralysis and destruction of our minds.

Again, there might have been an appeal to self-interest, as one of the most urgent motives of our nature. The future glories of the redeemed are spoken of as so transcendently perfect that language fails to convey an adequate conception of them to our minds; and the Scripture contains distinct intimations that pre-eminent marks of honour will be the blissful portion of those who, in their faithful ministry on earth, have turned many to righteousness, and have been wise in winning souls to Christ.

But when viewed as the sustaining motive, this too would have proved utterly inadequate for the work in hand. Self-interest is essentially a *calculating* principle, and its decisions are formed by balancing and comparing together the conflicting measures of good and evil, that result from any line of action intended to be pursued. And though to the eye of faith, in bright and perfect exercise, viewing the future inheritance as secure on the plighted word of a covenant-keeping God, self-interest will always harmonize with obedience to the plain commands of Christ; still so powerful are the opposing principles within us, with which faith has to maintain a constant

warfare, that the mere hope of reward, however great and glorious, if only future and unseen, will form a poor equivalent against present sufferings and toil.

No, Brethren, it is a deeper, a holier, a more enduring principle that can alone animate and support the devoted minister of Christ in that course of self-denial, suffering, persecution, toil, in which a faithful discharge of his office must of necessity involve him. And never did our blessed master more clearly manifest that “he knew what was in man,”—that he was acquainted with the comparative strength of every motive, and the secret workings of man’s inmost soul, than, when in preparation for the solemn charge to be intrusted to him, he addressed to his repentant disciple that most deep and touching appeal,—“Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me.*”

It is its simplicity as a motive, and that entire forgetfulness of self, which forms an essential feature in the character of perfect love, that renders it so powerful an instrument in any work in which it is engaged. Love implies by its existence that the character, the interests, the honour, of another, have become dearer to us than our own. In all its movements there is one single object kept steadily and constantly in view,—to please another rather than ourselves,—and to attain this end, there is no danger that would not be encountered; there is no sacrifice that would not willingly be endured; nay, trials are regarded as a source of joy, if only by our firm and manly bearing under them, we may give full proof of the constancy and devotedness of our love.

In all our social and domestic relationships, love forms the strongest and most enduring principle of action ; but various circumstances may arise which limit and controul its exercise, when objects merely earthly and material call forth this active principle into life.

Too close a scrutiny may bring to light some hidden failing, which mars the perfect beauty of the image which a warm imagination had pourtrayed ; cold and chilling indifference may stifle at its warmest burst the strongest feeling of man's nature, and drive backward, to its very source, the free, full, current of the heart's deepest love ; absence, estrangement, death, may, in different degrees, deaden or impair its influence.

But the love of the renewed heart to Christ knows nothing of the operation of these blighting influences on its freshness and its power. A deeper knowledge of his character can only serve to strengthen and confirm our feelings, as displaying, in increasing lustre, the infinite perfection of that Being, whom it is our high privilege to be called to love. And then, with him there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning."* He is the same great and glorious, and merciful, and tender Saviour,—“the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,”†—and best of all, we can never doubt his unchangeable love to us. Our very love to him springs from past experience of mercies, infinite and undeserved, freely and abundantly vouchsafed to us.—“We love him, because

* James, i, 17.

† Hebrews, xiii, 8.

he first loved us ;”*—we love him, because he bought us with his blood ;—we love him, because, by his converting spirit on our hearts, he marks and seals us for his own ;—we love him, because, as in the case of Peter, he freely heals our ten thousand backslidings, pardons all our sins, and keeps us, by his sustaining grace, for the salvation to be revealed in the last time.

It was to this principle of grateful love, as the sustaining motive for his work, that Christ made his appeal to Peter. And has not the same appeal, my Reverend Brethren, been made to us ? Nay, more, (whether in sincerity or no lies between our consciences and our God) have we not in point of fact responded to that appeal, and solemnly answered that we do love him ? Was less than this implied when, to that heart-searching question proposed to us in the ordination service of our Church, “ Do you think in your heart that you be truly called ? ” we severally answered that we did think it ? † A rightful call, without a heart devoted to our Lord ;—oh, that were solemn mockery indeed ! Will He, the jealous God, that will not share his glory with another, who claims the undivided heart from all who worship in his sanctuary, will He accept a partial and divided homage from those who minister within the precincts of the most holy place ? Man, who regards the outward call alone, may recognize the authority of our office, but will He, who looks within, accredit our commission, unless love for Christ, and love for

* 1 John, iv. 19.

† Ordination Service.

souls, for whom Christ died, forms the animating motive to devotedness in our master's cause?

I earnestly pray, for the sake of our own souls, and for the souls intrusted to our care, that we may all be in the number of those "who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity."* I pray that it may be so for our own sakes; for who can picture to himself a state more awful than that of one who, by his own deliberate act and deed, involves himself in all the responsibility of our office, and yet remains a stranger to the only source of peace, whence he can derive strength and consolation in his hour of need? He must bear the weight of souls; for once ordained a Minister of Christ, he has rivetted for himself a fetter stronger than one forged of bars of iron, from which no power on earth can loose him. But he has none to share that burden with him, and he must find, by bitter experience, that it is a crushing and an overwhelming weight, too heavy for him to bear alone. I speak only of his position here—of eternity I forbear to dwell.

But if it is bondage for himself, what must be the effects of his ministrations upon others? How cold and lifeless will be our preaching, unless the love of Christ—love to him for pardoning and converting grace, known and experienced within, lend fire and energy to our words! If souls are to be saved—if the work is to be done—if Christ is to be glorified in the conversion of sinners, the heralds of a world's redemption must themselves be men of

* Ephesians, vi. 24.

grace ;—men who know that there is a reality, and life, and peace, and joy, in the gospel they proclaim to others, and who in heartfelt sincerity can adopt the language of the Apostle, “ That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”*

Secondly.—We pass on to consider in the second place,—The special object for which the ministry was ordained—“ Jesus said unto him, Feed my Sheep.” The words are few, but what a depth of meaning do they not contain ! How forcibly does the simple figure employed point out to us the critical position of the precious charge intrusted to us—weak, wandering, helpless sheep ! Ours is the shepherd’s office ; and the qualities requisite for a faithful shepherd in the East, form, by their combination, the perfection of a Christian Minister’s character ;—uniting the most determined courage, the tenderest feeling, and the most untiring watchfulness and care. But time would not permit me to press this interesting analogy through its various features of resemblance. Our prominent and distinctive duty in the fold of Christ, is to **FEED** the flock committed to our charge ; or, in less figurative language, we are so to preach amongst our people, in all its fulness and freeness, the gospel of their salvation through Christ, that under the blessed influence of the Spirit, the doctrines that we preach may be life-giving and life-sustaining truths ; a source of strength, and consolation, and peace ;

* 1 John, i. 3.

“meat indeed, and drink indeed”* to the perishing souls of sinners.

But if this be so, it becomes a question of the first importance to ascertain the character of the food with which the sheep of Christ are to be fed. Now it will be at once admitted, that the preaching of Peter and his brethren would furnish the most practical commentary we could desire upon the command in the first place specially delivered to the Apostles. And blessed be God, we have not been left to form vague conceptions of our own upon so momentous a question as this; nor need our conclusions be drawn from a laborious comparison of early documents, or the uninspired and (how often) conflicting statements of traditionary record; but in the pages of one portion of the inspired volume, we possess not only the general outline of their system, but the very language that they used, and the very sermons which they preached, recorded for us by the finger of God himself.

It is in this point of view, as exhibiting to us so fully the character of Apostolic preaching, that the Acts of the Apostles have such special claim upon the prayerful study of every Minister of Christ. Moreover in the early history of the Church (therein recorded) as it gradually enlarged its borders, from Jerusalem to Samaria, from Samaria to the Gentile world, and through the ministry of St. Paul to the utmost limits of the Roman Empire, there is a diversity of scene and incident which affords the most

* John, vi. 55.

favourable opportunity of ascertaining the character of their preaching. Every conceivable condition of society, as well as the most varied forms of individual character, are successively brought within the influence of the Apostles' ministrations. Now let the tone of their discourses, under these infinitely varied circumstances, be scrutinized and compared, and what is the result of the comparison? Must we not acknowledge that, though they may occasionally vary (and yet how trifling even here is this variance) in minor points of detail, that the outline is universally the same? There is one grand pervading doctrine, fully, forcibly, and *unreservedly* announced, lending power and life to every message they proclaimed; which cannot be displaced from the prominent and distinctive position it enjoys, without destroying the harmony of the whole, and the omission of which would be practically to blot out the sun itself from their system, and to leave a darkness that can be felt behind. The gospel that they preached was simply this—Salvation for the chief of sinners, through the blood of an atoning Saviour. They preached “Christ crucified;” dying for our sins; rising again for our justification; and in his character of eternal High Priest, carrying on, at the right hand of God, the great work commenced on earth. Trace them where you will, their custom is universally the same. Whether their message is delivered to the assembled Sanhedrim at Jerusalem; to the half-civilized inhabitant of Lystra; to the luxurious and dissolute Corinthian; or to the refined philosopher of Athens, Christ is at once announced as the alone and all-

sufficient sacrifice for sin, and all (be their previous character what it might) are entreated to receive the message—to lay hold by faith on the pardon and righteousness so freely offered them, and thus obtain a personal interest in the general blessings of redemption.

To quote the whole body of evidence on this point would be little short of transcribing the book itself, but the following instances are adduced as abundantly sufficient in themselves to confirm the general position we maintain, and at the same time as illustrating, in the most striking manner, the wonderful adaptation of this saving truth to the most varied conditions of human infirmity :—

And first of all we naturally turn to the preaching of St. Peter at the day of Pentecost, as the earliest exhibition of the Apostles' ministry, after the gift of the Spirit had been bestowed upon them. And here it may be observed in passing, that a more complete refutation of the doctrine of reserve, as it has been attempted to be revived in the bosom of our Church, can scarcely be conceived. If moral unworthiness in those who heard it could ever have justified the ambassadors of Christ in withholding somewhat of the glorious message of salvation, surely it was when that message was proclaimed to the very **MURDERERS** of the Holy and the Just One. But Peter knew nothing of this holding back of sacred truth ; he had no previous discipline to inculcate ; he employed no preparatory teaching, as if, by some mysterious process,

a moral fitness for the reception of this saving truth was to be attained ; but throughout the whole body of his discourse, he preached to them “ Christ crucified ;” and as if the more powerfully to arrest the attention of his hearers to this one point, he briefly summed up the substance of his message by a most marked and emphatic repetition of the same truth—“ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* Now, mark the successful issue of this faithful preaching of the cross ! See how effectually it wrought by the working of the Spirit to the breaking even of hearts of stone !—“ They were pricked in their hearts.” Yes ; those very men, who a few days before, in their misguided and infuriated zeal, had crucified the Lord of glory,—“ they were pricked in their hearts,” and in all the earnestness of awakened guilt, cried “ Men and Brethren, what must we do ?” And being further instructed in the way, they gladly received the word, i. e. with undoubting faith they closed with the message of love, (for a hearty reception of the word, is the scriptural notion of saving faith,) and then, *worthily* receiving the sacrament of baptism, they were incorporated into the Church of Christ.

The character of the Ethiopian Eunuch presents a most striking contrast to those whose conversion we have just considered. He was an anxious enquirer after truth, seeing darkly and dimly the purposes of God ; but he wisely sought instruction

* Acts, ii. 36.

at the fountain head of light, for when Philip, at the instigation of the Lord, joined himself to the chariot, he found the Eunuch engaged in the study of the word of God. The Spirit had directed his mind to that particular portion of the prophet Isaiah, where the doctrine of the atonement, through a suffering Messiah, is most explicitly and unequivocally asserted. Here was Philip's text. "Christ crucified" was the foundation of his preaching,—“he opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus.”* The effect was instantaneous. At this wondrous exhibition of God's love to sinners, it were as though a flood of light from heaven had burst upon his soul; the mist of former ignorance—his doubts and fears—all vanished from his heart, as “the Sun of righteousness arose with healing on his wing.”† He saw in the crucified Redeemer, the sufficient satisfaction for sin, on which a conscience-stricken sinner could repose with confidence. He at once asserts his heartfelt and entire reliance on the Messiah proclaimed to him in the gospel,—“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,”§ and on this noble confession of his faith, received in baptism the sign and seal of his adoption, and “went on his way rejoicing.”

The last but not least remarkable case to which allusion need be made, is the conversion of the Philippian Jailor. A dark and ignorant heathen, a stranger to the first elements of vital religion, is suddenly aroused to an interest about his soul's salvation ;

* Acts, viii. 35.

† Mal. iv. 2.

§ Acts, viii. 37—39.

and in agony of doubt, feeling that the issue of life or death eternal hung upon his answer, he turns to the Apostle with the heart-moving question, "What must I do to be saved?"* He spoke to one well competent to resolve his fears. Once a persecutor and a blasphemer, Saul, of Tarsus, had found mercy through Christ; and, like an experienced preacher, he leads him to that "fountain opened for all uncleanness,"† in which he had washed away the guilt of his own sins. He knew that it was a "faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"§ and cheered the trembling jailor with the announcement that the simple acceptance of this Saviour, as preached to him in the gospel, would ensure the peace and salvation which his soul required,—“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”||

Here then was the gospel preached in all its simplicity by the first ambassadors of Christ. Has it not been left on record, Brethren, as a model for our own? Nor will it avail to answer that the altered circumstances of the Church demand a corresponding change in the character of our preaching. The record itself seems to have anticipated and answered the objection. What greater contrast can be conceived than between the circumcised Jew—in outward covenant with God; possessed of every ordinance and means of grace; a divinely instituted Church; a consecrated Priesthood; the written word; sacraments duly administered and ordained—and the idolatrous

* Acts, xvi. 30. † Zech. xiii. 1. § 1 Tim. i. 15. || Acts, xvi. 31.

inhabitants of Corinth, “strangers from the covenant of promise, and without God in the world,”—and yet “Christ crucified” was the gospel preached to both. How broad a line of distinction can be drawn between the position of Cornelius on the one hand, and the sceptical philosopher of Athens on the other, and yet the Apostolic doctrine is the same—to both they preach “Jesus and the resurrection!” Let it be granted that a change exists, it is a difference that exists only upon the surface; the material on which the gospel has to act—man’s heart and nature—remains essentially unchanged: there is the same principle of hatred against the gospel to be removed; the same proud unbelief to be combatted; the same passions to be controlled; the same affections to be conciliated; the same hard heart of stone to be changed; and as man’s nature is the same, so the instrument and the agent in the great work of man’s conversion are the same to day, as in the first ages of the Church. It is still “by the foolishness of preaching that it pleases God to save them that believe.”* The eternal Spirit still witnesses to the faithful preaching of the gospel, and makes the word, though spoken in much fear and trembling, a word in season to the souls of sinners.

It is this identity of man’s nature in every age, that stamps “the Acts of the Apostles” with its peculiar value. We not only regard it as an interesting record of the past, but as containing in itself the spiritual and internal history of the Church as exhibited in our own days,—it is the manual and

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

text book for our daily ministrations—presenting to us the faithful models of the various classes brought under our teaching, and furnishing us with the safest treatment of their cases, upon the authority of the Apostles themselves. The baptized formalist—the earnest and anxious enquirer—the hardened and abandoned reprobate—all find their counterparts in the divine record, and in each and every case the simple preaching of “Christ crucified” is found the sovereign remedy for their disorders—to spiritualize the one class—to strengthen and confirm the second—to arouse and to convert them all.

It is not only for the unconverted members of our flocks, that a constant recurrence, and prominent setting forth of the doctrine of the atonement, is demanded. Nor must we imagine that in consulting for the spiritual welfare of the weakest saint within the fold of Christ, the interests of the matured believer are forgotten. Its comprehensiveness—its perfect adaptation for the wants of all, is the peculiar beauty of this faithful preaching of the cross—Is it milk for babes?—it is no less wine and strong meat for men. St. Paul in the same chapter in which he expresses his determination to know nothing “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,”* immediately subjoins “howbeit we speak *wisdom* among them that are *perfect*.”† So integral a portion is it of vital christianity—so closely interwoven with the whole fabric of our religion—that no christian grace can be enforced, no practical obligation recommended, without of necessity involving an explicit statement of this truth.

* 1 Cor. ii. 2.

† 1 Cor. ii. 6.

Would we urge upon our people the exceeding sinfulness of sin?—we preach “Christ crucified,” as the most signal exhibition of God’s righteous hatred of sin, written in characters of blood. Is holiness of heart and life to be inculcated as a solemn obligation on the Christian?—again we preach “Christ crucified,” and remind them that it “is the blood of Him who offered himself without spot to God,” that can alone “purge their consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.”* Is an entire surrender and dedication of themselves to God to be effectually enforced?—we preach “Christ crucified,” as the price paid for their obedience, and deduce at once the conclusion, that, as Christ’s by right of purchase, they must “glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are his.”† Would we discipline them for the joys of heaven?—we preach “Christ crucified,” as the meetest preparation for mingling with that blessed company of the redeemed, who, in the realms of glory, look back with adoring thankfulness to the cross at Calvary, and the burden of whose eternal anthem is, blessing, and honour, and glory, to “the Lamb that was slain.”§

My Beloved Brethren, I will only add a few words of exhortation, and conclude.

The providence of God has cast our lot in no ordinary crisis of our Church’s history. There are opposing elements at work, which seem to threaten the peace and stability of our fold. There is a mighty pressure from without. Infidelity, Romanism, and

* Heb. ix. 14.

† 1 Cor. vi. 20.

§ Rev. v. 12.

(perhaps the most alarming principle of all) a dark spirit of insubordination, which views all constituted powers, and therefore the legitimate authority of an appointed ministry, as a bondage too galling to be endured, are severally marshalled against our Church, in open and acknowledged warfare ; and not content with carrying on the work of opposition in their distinct and separate spheres, are found united in a monstrous and unnatural confederacy, to ensure, if possible, the overthrow of our Church.

But I pass them by, not only because they bear but little on the subject more immediately before us, but because I feel that it is the Christian's privilege to regard with comparative composure the wildest ragings of opposition from without. The whole analogy of history confirms the fact, that persecution and depression are the healthiest atmosphere the Church of Christ can breathe ; and it has been in those days, when constancy to their Master's cause demanded a resistance even unto blood, that His servants have borne the boldest and most unshrinking testimony to the "truth as it is in Jesus." And we doubt not if our Church is once more doomed to pass through the fiery furnace of persecution, that strength equal to her day will be supplied to her from above, and she will come forth refined and purified from the trial. No ; the danger is from within. It has ever been the falling away from first love—the faithless withdrawal of light—the changing of the simplicity of gospel truth—within the Church, which, from time to time, has called down the just vengeance of heaven upon it, and caused the removal of the

candlestick from a land.—“If the light which is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!”* “Salt is good;”† “but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted.”§

Brethren, is there not cause in these times for the most jealous watchfulness over ourselves? Can we be too often reminded of the solemn exhortation of St. Paul, “Take heed unto thyself, and to the doctrine?”‡ Have we not especial need of the teaching of God’s Spirit on our hearts, that being ourselves instructed in the way of truth, we may boldly and faithfully proclaim it to our people? Is there no cause of trembling, lest “another gospel” than that which Paul and Peter preached, should find its way into the bosom of our Church? And be it remembered for our warning, that the Apostolic Anathema remains unrepealed in all its awful severity—“Though we or an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.”|| The gospel which they preached was, in the most emphatic sense, good news to sinners. It was a message of peace, and joy, and love. “Christ crucified” was the grand doctrine of their gospel. In his precious death, and glorious intercession, the vilest sinner found a sure foundation for his hopes, and a resting place for his troubled soul. He had but to accept the message, and being justified by faith, he found peace through Christ, and “rejoiced in the hope of the glory of God.”¶

So prominent and distinctive a feature in all

* Mat. vi. 23.

† Mark ix. 50.

§ Mat. v. 13.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 16.

|| Gal. i. 8.

¶ Rom. v. 2.

their ministrations, is this simple preaching of the cross of Christ, and salvation through faith in his blood, that the humble and unlearned Christian is thereby furnished with a sure and unerring test, by which the truth or falsity of any doctrinal system may be ascertained. Have we not then, I ask again, cause for the most trembling watchfulness, when we see around us the rapid inroads of a system of Theology which (to say the least) bears a most indistinct resemblance to the gospel of the Apostles?—a system which elevates the ceremonial of religion to an equality with the spiritual and eternal truths of the gospel,—which wins upon the senses by its magnificent conceptions of “the Church,” imposing and sublime in theory, but to those, alas! who fly to it for peace, for consolation, and for food, proving itself a bright phantom, most shadowy and unreal: a system which distorts the simple doctrine of the Sacraments, as taught in Scripture, and in the formularies of our Church, and exhibits them in their workings on the souls of men, rather as mystic charms, than moral means, dependent for their wholesome operation on the due and *faithful* reception of the same—which substitutes for the glorious doctrine of Justification by Faith, a cold and joyless creed, which holds out scarce a ray of hope for those who forfeit their baptismal purity by wilful sin; and lastly, as if to seal its own condemnation, would prohibit the unreserved preaching of the Atonement, as an unhallowed approach to the doctrines of Socinianism. Brethren, “I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say.”*

* 1 Corinthians, x. 15.

We have not now to ask the tendency of the system to which allusion has been made. History, if with unbiassed minds we would have received its testimony, would long ago have warned us where it must end. But a readier solution is before us. We have heard of late of confessed movements towards Rome, and of wanderers only to be retained in our communion, by a forced and unnatural interpretation of our formularies;—a principle of interpretation which involves in its admission a virtual surrender of “the faith, once delivered to the saints,”* and by the grace of God revived in our Church, by the piety and zeal of our protesting forefathers. Recent occurrences have spoken in a language too significant to be mistaken. Can we resist the deliberate conviction (and surely in times like these it would be faithlessness to shrink from the avowal) that the principles of this “other gospel,” if boldly and consistently carried out to their legitimate results, must undermine the very foundation of our Church, and bring us back to the same dark bondage from which our emancipation was effected by the blood of our martyred Reformers?† Again, “I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say.”

* Jude, 3.

† We cannot be too thankful to Mr. Newman for his explanatory Letter, addressed to Dr. Jelf. From an authority which cannot be suspected, (viz. Mr. Newman's own confession) we learn the natural tendency of that religious system, which he and his coadjutors are so zealously endeavouring to establish in our Church. I feel that nothing more is necessary to justify the strong language used above, in reference to Tract No. 90, than to quote the Author's own account of the motive which induced him to give to the world that most extraordinary publication.—“I may be wrong in my conviction, I may be wrong in the mode I adopt to meet it, but still the Tract is grounded on the belief that

Ponder well, I implore you, the position in which, as Ministers of the gospel, we are placed. Private Christians, with the light of God's revelation in their hands, are responsible to Him for the truth or error of the doctrines they maintain ; but, as ambassadors of Christ,—as the authorized teachers of his religion,—ours is a far more awful and complicated responsibility than this. The eternal interests of thousands are materially involved in the truth or error of the doctrines which we teach. “We watch for souls as those who must give account,”* and the blood of lost souls, whether lost through the ungodliness of our lives, through the carelessness and indifference of our ministrations, or through the faithless perversion of gospel truth, will be required at the watchman's hands.

May the God of all truth impart unto us “the spirit of wisdom and understanding,” that we may “hold fast the form of sound words,”† and that we may so “take heed unto ourselves and unto our doctrine, and continue in them, that we may both save

* Hebrews, xiii, 17.

† 2 Tim. i, 13.

the Articles need not be so closed as the received method of teaching closes them, and ought not to be for the sake of many persons. If we will close them, we run the risk of subjecting persons whom we should least like to lose or distress, *to the temptation of joining the Church of Rome, or to the necessity of withdrawing from the Church as established, or to misery of subscribing with doubt and hesitation.* And, as to myself, I was led especially to exert myself with reference to this difficulty, from having had it earnestly urged upon me by parties I revere, *to do all I could to keep members of our Church from straggling in the direction of Rome* ; and not being able to pursue the methods commonly adopted, and being persuaded that the view of the Articles I have taken is true and honest, I was anxious to set it before them.”—Mr. Newman's Letter to Dr. Jelf, in explanation of Tract No. 90.—Page 26.

ourselves, and them that hear us !”* As Ministers of Christ, with the Scriptures as our guide, and the Apostles’ preaching as our safest model, may we “determine to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and him crucified !”† As Ministers of our own Church, let us call to mind that Justification by Faith, as it was the grand theme of the Apostles’ preaching, so was it likewise the watchword of our glorious Reformation ; and as faithful followers of the Reformers, as we believe them to have been faithful followers of the Apostles, may we make the same doctrine the groundwork of our ministrations amongst our people ; and as we preach the gospel faithfully from our pulpits, may we shew forth the power of it in our lives, and thus “feeding the flock of Christ which is amongst us,”§ “when the chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away !”‡

* 1 Tim. iv. 16.

† 1 Cor. ii. 2.

§ 1 Peter, v. 2.

‡ 1 Peter, v. 4



